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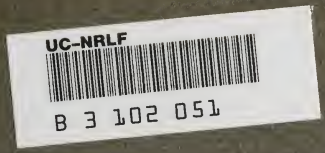

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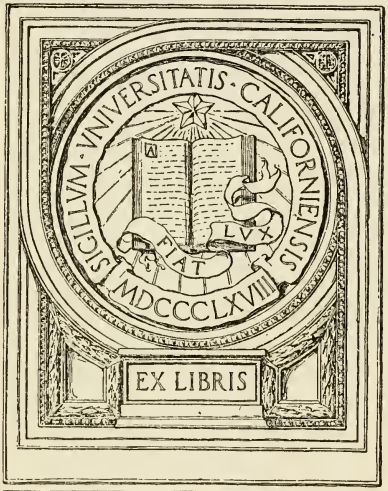

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THOUGHTS ON INDIAN UNIVERSITIES.

INDIAN readers probably are weary of discussions on the subject of education. Nevertheless, as Mill observed :

Education, in its larger sense, is one of the most inexhaustible of all topics. Though there is hardly any subject on which so much has been written, by so many of the wisest men, it is as fresh to those who come to it with a fresh mind, a mind not hopelessly filled full with other people's conclusions, as it was to the first explorers of it; and, notwithstanding the great mass of excellent things which have been said respecting it, no thoughtful person finds any lack of things, both great and small, still waiting to be said, or waiting to be developed and followed out to their consequences.

Mr. Bryce's recent proposal to reform out of existence my university, Trinity College, Dublin, has forced me to take an active part in the defence of my *alma mater*, and at the same time to think about the objects, means, and methods of university education. Inasmuch as I never was a professed teacher, and have had little practical experience of teaching, perhaps my mind may be considered to possess the freshness desired by Mill as a necessity for a writer on the subject, and it may be that my desultory thoughts about universities, even if not new, may have the good luck to interest some of the readers of this magazine.

The almost insuperable difficulties of the Irish University problem are mainly due to the fact that the two great sections into which the people are divided cherish different and irreconcilable ideals, and that of these one only is acceptable to the dominant opinion of England and Scotland. Unluckily, the section of the Irish people which favours the ideal antipathetic to English and Scotch notions is by far the largest in Ireland, and the British majority in Parliament is thus brought to a position of antagonism towards the wishes of

447107

the Irish majority. Most of the Irish people are Roman Catholics, guided in educational policy by their Bishops, who claim the right to exercise an active and effective control over faith and morals, and so to determine what should be taught or not taught, and to fix the boundaries between faith and science. The clergy of the Protestant minority make no such claim, and if they did venture to make it, the laity would not listen to it, and would assert their right to freedom of reading, research, and teaching without regard to the limits of orthodoxy. In a word, the Roman Catholic Church asserts in education the principle of faith and authority, while the Protestants assert the principle of free thought. The two principles are essentially irreconcilable, and the attempts of politicians to compromise between them within limits acceptable to British opinions have ended so far in failure and disaster. The Irish University Bill of 1873 brought Mr. Gladstone's powerful Cabinet down with a crash in the following year, and the legislation suggested by Mr. Bryce possibly may have the same effect on the present Cabinet, if his proposals are persevered in.

The various more or less practicable solutions of the Irish University problem can have little interest for Indian readers; and I have referred to them because consideration of them brought forcibly home to my mind the happy exemption of India generally from the sectarian troubles which place so many thorns in the path of education in the United Kingdom. Muhammedan educationists, it is true, have to face the problem of reconciling the claims of the faith with those of the modern spirit, but the question so raised is one for solution within the fold of Islam, and in practice enlightened Muhammedans, like the Amir of Cabul, seem to be in a fair way of solving it.

The glory of Hinduism—in which Buddhism may be included—consists in its absolute recognition of freedom of thought. An orthodox Hindu may belong to any conceivable school of philosophic thought, materialistic, idealistic, pantheistic, or anything else. A man may be counted as still a good Hindu, even if he denies the existence of God, or of the soul. In fact, Hinduism permits to the fullest extent the unfettered freedom of human thought in the limitless domain of philosophy and religion. In this weighty matter the students of Indian Universities enjoy a privilege which few of their

fellows in Europe can be said to possess in equal fulness. In most European Universities the influence of the traditions of the various churches is so strong that few men escape it, and the holding of generally unpalatable speculative opinions is apt to involve at least a certain amount of social disfavour.

The governing authorities of the Indian Universities, like the students, are ordinarily free from the necessity of trying to compromise between the claims of faith and those of authority, and so striving to reconcile the irreconcilable. The Bonn device of alternative courses in controversial subjects, like history and philosophy, which Mr. Bryce recommends to Ireland for imitation, is superfluous in India.

The difficulties of the university reformer and legislator who seeks to provide for Indian needs are of a different kind. The most radical difficulty which confronts him is that the idea of university education in India is wholly foreign, and has no roots in the past history of the country. British and German Universities, not to mention others, have grown up from time to time, as one of the products of the national life, and the widely variant forms which they have assumed, are the outcome of the needs of the ages, as felt by the people themselves. If the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge still in the twentieth century retain in their buildings and systems many traces of monasticism, it is because they have been gradually evolved from mediæval institutions differing little from monasteries. In India no such evolution has taken place. The native governments never developed any system of public instruction, and the private agencies for teaching existed in a form too crude to serve as a basis for modern universities.

To some extent the same difficulty exists in Ireland. The schools are mostly wretched, and the well-meant British attempts to establish an Irish University system all have failed more or less completely, because the institutions founded have been established by external command, and have had no root in the soil. Even the University of Dublin, that is to say, Trinity College, notwithstanding its splendid record, and the long line of brilliant scholars educated during three centuries within its walls, is still in the main the University of a single sect or Church, the Episcopalian. Trinity College never has succeeded in becoming the national University,

and enlisting the sympathy of Irishmen of all shades of creed and politics. The Queen's University, founded in 1849, lasted for only thirty years, and was then abolished to make way for the Royal University, an examining Board, which all parties are now willing to destroy.

The Indian Universities suffer from the same want of root. They are mere cuttings stuck down in an uncongenial soil, and kept alive with difficulty by the constant watering of a paternal Government. Lord Curzon thought to reform them, and laboured hard to make them better. Probably. some real improvement in organisation and methods of teaching has been effected, but certainly the changes have not won universal approval. On the contrary, they excited lively controversy in Bengal, and are among the causes which have produced the unrest prevailing in that province. Perhaps Lord Curzon was too thoroughly saturated with the peculiar Oxford tradition to be well qualified for the part of university reformer in India The difficulties in the way of devising a satisfactory Indian University system are enormous, but they cannot be overcome by the application of Oxford methods.

Connected with the weakness inherent in Indian Universities as a consequence of their extraneous origin is the necessity that all instruction has to be given in the English language, which is a foreign tongue to the great majority of the students. The variety of Indian vernaculars, and the impossibility of communicating through their medium the kinds of knowledge now in request, forbid any change in this respect. The Universities of India undoubtedly must be content to do the best they can with English, but "only Indian college teachers," Mr. Havell observes, "can realise what an impediment to real culture is the system of making a foreign language the medium of all instruction." Antiquarians tell us that the Latin word *universitas* meant a guild or corporation ; but the term "University" has completely lost its original meaning, and, as now used, tends more and more to be associated in men's thoughts with the adjective "universal," as connoting an institution which aims, more or less completely, at supplying teaching in all the branches of learning which the students frequenting it are likely to demand. Another characteristic of a University as now understood is the power to grant degrees—formal certificates of proficiency given at the end of a long course, presumably

superior to those given by less ambitious institutions, and commanding more or less general acceptance. In the United States the term "University" is used more laxly, but in the British dominions it always connotes the degree-giving power. All the Indian Universities grant degrees, and all aim at supplying teaching in all the "faculties" or courses in local demand, although in practice they may fall far short of that ideal. A third factor in the conception of a modern University is that it should not concern itself with the rudimentary teaching proper for schools, but that primarily it should devote its energies to training the minds of young men and women who have left school, but not entered on active life; and secondarily, should supply facilities for research by advanced students.

Most universities in the world now admit female students ; and even Oxford and Cambridge, notwithstanding their obstinate conservatism, allow women to participate to a large extent in the university teaching, while still confining their formal degrees and many other privileges to the male sex. Dublin has thrown open its teaching and degrees to women without restriction. The Indian Universities, being merely examining boards, make no distinction between the sexes.

In 1857, when the Calcutta University, the oldest in India, was founded, the English people believed fervently in the magic value of examinations, and were convinced that the ideal university was an examining board maintaining a high standard of examination. The University of London was founded under the influence of this belief, and the Indian and modern Irish Universities were copied from the London model. But opinion has veered round. Examining boards are out of favour, and the cry is for "teaching universities," the institutions based on the original London pattern being denounced as injurious to true education. Thus the Royal University in Ireland is reproached for having degraded the idea of education in that country, and has now scarcely a friend. The University of London has been remodelled to suit the new conception, and will no longer give its degrees to any one who chooses to come up from anywhere to pass the examinations. Attendance at lectures given at a recognised college is now demanded as an essential qualification for a degree.

The modern English notion of a University may, therefore, be

defined as meaning a superior teaching institution, which undertakes the mental training in all literary and scientific subjects for which there is a demand by adolescent men and women, and grants formal certificates of proficiency to the students who pass successfully through a course lasting for three or four years. The more advanced and ambitious universities also consciously aim at stimulating and fostering original research. The last-mentioned aim has hardly any place in the programme of the Indian Universities, which cannot expect to take high rank among the universities of the world as long as they remain subject to this reproach.

A fully developed university, according to the highest modern ideal, should include art—or in old-fashioned phrase, the fine arts—as well as literature and science ; but at present the artistic side of education is much neglected everywhere. The Indian Universities ignore it. In a recent number of this magazine (January, 1907) Mr. Havell has vigorously urged the claims of art to recognition. He succeeded in obtaining official recognition of his ideal so far as to induce the faculty of arts at Calcutta to pass unanimously an abstract resolution that "in the interests of general culture, Art should not be excluded from the arts course of the University." But no practical result followed, and to all appearance none is likely to follow within the lifetime of any who read this article. Mr. Havell recognises that the revised scheme of University courses, introduced under pressure from Lord Curzon, "probably will achieve a much better teaching of literature and science."

But, he argues, as a scheme of national culture it presents the same obvious defects as before, namely, that it imports into India all the narrowness and exclusiveness which University teaching in Europe derived from the Middle Ages. It insists that the intellectual organisation of educated India must conform to one of two types, either that of the man of letters or that of the man of science. To the art student the University simply says—"Come if you will, but we do not recognise art either as one of the higher studies or as useful in the intellectual development of a University student. We have a faculty of arts, but the art faculty is not one we think worth cultivating." It may be said, (Mr. Havell further observes,) in support of the total exclusion of art from the courses of Indian Universities, that they are in that respect following the precedent of similar institutions in Europe. But though the education

of European Universities differs widely from the Greek ideal of culture, there will be found in the best European Universities an artistic spirit which is conspicuously wanting in the Indian Universities. There is no precedent in Europe for the squalid environment, the absence of all stimulus for the spiritual side of human nature, and the neglect of all that conduces to the brightness of school or college life such as we usually find about all Indian Universities.

Mr. Havell then proceeds to point out that the net of the Indian Universities has been cast far too wide. In European countries multitudes of well-educated men never think of entering a university. In India, according to popular estimation, the passing of the matriculation examination has come to be regarded as the hall-mark of a good education, and even the "entrance fail" man thinks himself much better than his neighbour who never sat for the matriculation examination. The whole business is a miserable caricature of university education, and the evil has been much increased by the action of the provincial governments in insisting on the passing of university matriculation, "First Arts," or B. A. examinations as the necessary preliminary to public employment. It would be much better to exact a good leaving certificate from a High School than to force every youth who wants the pettiest official appointment to go through the farce of "entering a University." Most of those who thus "enter" never go any further. I do not know what the percentage of nominal undergraduates who take a degree is at present, but it must be very small. The Calcutta university, we are told, boasts of being the largest in the world. Rightly regarded, its size is a matter for shame rather than for boasting. The Indian universities cannot help the inherent defects that they are purely foreign institutions, worked through the medium of a foreign language, and their defects must always be a source of weakness. But they might be saved from contempt if they made an honest effort to limit themselves to real university work, and put a stop to the sham matriculations of bogus undergraduates. I know, of course, that the Indian so-called universities are merely pieces of bureaucratic machinery, worked by the Department of Public Instruction, and that they have little, if any, internal life or energy. It is useless to ask an Indian university to reform itself, because it does not possess the power. All demands for reforms must be addressed to the Government of India, and I confess

that there seems to be little hope of any radical reform coming from that source. The first requisite for genuine reform seems to be a vast diminution in the number of young people who nominally "enter" the universities, and the restriction of the university operations to the minute fraction of the population which really wants university training. The duty of supplying the minimum of English instruction required for service in the minor Government offices should be relegated to the High Schools, supplemented, if need be, by departmental examinations. The honoured name of University is degraded in India by the direct action of the Government, and cannot be raised to its rightful place in public esteem until the Government of India admits the error of its ways. The bestowal of a fellowship in an Indian university is no honour, and the slight value of an Indian fellowship is the measure of the value of Indian universities.

The Government of Bombay has taken action in the direction suggested by substituting the "school final examinations" for the matriculation as a qualification for subordinate Government service, but so far it is the only provincial Government which has done anything serious to check the formation of crowds of sham undergraduates. Three other Provinces—Madras, the Punjab, and the United Provinces—allow the "school final examination" tof orm an alternative qualification. We are assured (*Imperial Gazetteer*, New Edition, Vol. IV. p. 425) that "the general question of the school final examinations in their relation to Government and other employment, and to the universities, is at present under consideration." It is to be hoped, rather than expected, that official consideration will give due weight to the proper conceptions of the function of a University, and will not approach the question merely from the point of view of the head of an office. As a rule, subject, of course, to reasonable exceptions, nobody should enter a University who does not intend, or at least hope, to take a degree. As at present arranged, the matriculation examinations for the Indian Universities do not deserve the name. In reality, except in Bombay, they are examinations for certificate of the minimum amount of knowledge required from a candidate for Government employ. Most of the young people who sit for the so-called matriculation examinations have no more intention or hope of becoming B.A. or B.Sc., than they have of becoming

F. R. S.; andwhen they have passed the examination, they are not, in any true sense, members of a university. Although I am not provided with statistics of the proportions of graduates to entrants in any particular Indian University, the fact that in the year 1901-02 in all India, nearly 23,000 students passed the "entrance" examinations, while less than 1,500 took a Bachelor's degree, is sufficiently eloquent, and clearly proves that it is the exception for a student who nominally enters the university to proceed to a degree.

This proposition alone is a sufficient and unanswerable condemnation of the existing constitution and management of the five Indian Universities, or at least of four of them, Calcutta, Madras, Allahabad, and the Punjab. Institutions which are content to fill their registers with names and their coffers with fees by allowing every year thousands of ill-educated young people to place their names on the books, who have not the slightest intention of going through a university course, are shams, mere cardboard imitations of universities. No limitation of the number of members of the Senate, no revision of the curriculum will make the institution in Calcutta, the principal of its kind, worthy of the name of University, until it is purged of its bogus undergraduates. The recent scandalous behaviour of so many "university students" in various parts of India emphasises the necessity for this fundamental reform. If the universities were restricted to their legitimate function—the giving of superior education to the small class really requiring it—these mobs of miscalled "university students" would not exist. They are really only naughty school boys, and should be treated accordingly.

Some years ago (*Pioneer Mail*, August 16th, 1901), Professor Geddes published a letter to an Indian friend entitled, "The Best Universities for India." It is a pity that such a suggestive discourse should have appeared only in a newspaper to be forgotten. One of the Professor's best suggestions is that Indian University reformers should study the example of France, a country far more akin to India than England is. "It is at present," he observes, "one of your many educational misfortunes in India that you only know the acute insularity of Oxford and Cambridge when you get outside the examination machine of London, except in so far"—here the good Scotchman speaks—"as the Scottish doctor or missionary may have any influence." He goes on to say, "Science, which, like ours in England,

too often loses touch with the Continent and America, is not wide enough to inspire India, which must in this respect be as free and eclectic as Japan."

The "acute insularity" of which Professor Geddes justly complains, has ruined the well-meant British attempts to frame systems of university education for both Ireland and India. The ordinary British politician knows as much about India as Ireland, which is another way of saying that he knows nothing about either.

The Indian Universities will do no good if they continue to aim at "a more or less faithful or weak reproduction" of English graduates. "Utilise," as Professor Geddes urges, "all that is best in Europe, but do so by help of all that is best in India, not by abandoning it.' But "let us have done with trying to educate princes into public-school-boys, pundits into honours graduates, babus into cheap clerks, peasants into proletarians. As well make our forest officers into hill-men, our magistrates into fakirs. It is not the best use of each."

These lively sayings of the Scotch Professor indicate a radical defect in the existing Indian Universities. Not only are they foreign in origin and language, but they are also foreign in aim and method. Until they are reorganised with a definite purpose to make them truly Indian, they will not have any root. How this is to be done, I am not prepared to say offhand ; but if the purpose is clear and the object aimed at distinctly seen, means will be found to hit the mark. So much may be said that when an Indian student is bidden to study philosophy, he should not be forced to try and accommodate his mind to the unfamiliar forms of European speculation, but should be encouraged to work on the lines laid down by the great thinkers of his own country, who may justly claim equality with Plato, Aristotle, and Kant. The lectures and examinations in philosophy for the students of an Indian University should be primarily on Indian ethics and metaphysics, the European systems being taught only for the sake of contrast and illustration. So far as I know the courses prescribed by the Indian Universities are not on these lines, and few of the existing professors would be competent to carry out the necessary reform. History, too, should be treated in the same way, and be approached from the Eastern, not the Western side. This change also would impose no small strain on the present

staff, and would require extensive alterations in the prescribed books, and in the whole spirit of the teaching.

Some day, perhaps, the man in power will arise who is not hide-bound by the unversity traditions of his youth, who will perceive that an Indian University deserving of the name must devote itself to the development of Indian thought and learning, and who will care enough for true higher education to establish a real University in India. There is not one now.

VINCENT A. SMITH.

England.

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